

Abstract 539

TITLE: What Is the Risk? A Review of Studies of Oral Transmission of HIV

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BACKGROUND/OBJECTIVE: While causal contact has not been implicated in transmission of HIV, the risk of oral transmission of HIV has been incompletely assessed. Oral sex practices are increasing in frequency, especially among gay men who may change behavior in response to perceived HIV risks.

METHODS: Literature review AIDSLINE, MEDLINE, and PSYCHLIT with keywords oral transmission of HIV, oral intercourse, oral sex, transmission of HIV, and epidemiology of HIV.

RESULTS: Since 1984, more than 65 epidemiologic studies have assessed the risk of HIV from orogenital contact. Since 1987, 21 case reports of 42 potential instances of oral transmission have been reported. Assessment of the actual risk of HIV attributed to oral sex has been difficult because early epidemiologic studies were inadequately powered to address the question, the frequency of oral sex was not ascertained, and the practice was associated with unprotected receptive anal intercourse or other sexual practices. Modeling studies estimate per-contact transmission risk and vary from 1 in 600,000 to more recent estimates of .03%. Per-contact risk of oral transmission may vary according to viral load, stage of HIV infection and antiretroviral treatment status.

CONCLUSION: The risk of oral transmission appears to be low for single sex acts; however more recent epidemiologic studies indicate a relative risk of receptive oral-penile intercourse that exceeds 1.0. Data about other oral sex acts are difficult to interpret because oral sex may include various combinations of insertive and receptive behaviors involving oral cavity, vagina, rectum and penis. Increased frequency of oral sexual practices, even for a relatively low-risk sexual activity, will obviously increase the contribution of oral sex to transmission of HIV, especially in the absence of other risk behaviors.

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